



**CONNECT remains a vital link
in Southeastern Mass and the Cape**

CONNECT, a 13-year public higher education partnership in Southeastern Massachusetts and Cape Cod, has remained steadfast in its goal to enhance educational effectiveness, economic health and cultural life in a region of the state that's not without its challenges.

The organization was founded in 2003 by the presidents and chancellor of all two- and four-year institutions in the region – Bridgewater State University, Bristol Community College, Cape Cod Community College, Massasoit Community College, Massachusetts Maritime Academy and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

Over the years, CONNECT's projects have ranged from collaboratively improving internal efficiencies to developing external relationships with school districts, businesses and nonprofits in the region.

Early on, the group found collective campus efficiencies, and hammered out transfer articulation agreements in mathematics and English. Soon, the scope of work was expanded to developing external partnerships and CONNECT was hosting economic development summits.

Today, under the leadership of its third executive director, Dr. Stacey Kaminski, CONNECT is involved in educational intervention and STEM-focused programming in partnership with the region's six Gateway Cities communities of Attleboro, Barnstable, Brockton, Fall River, New Bedford and Taunton and supporting business partners.

Meanwhile, CONNECT continues its investment and commitment to professional development at the middle-management level of all member campuses through its Key Talent Leadership Program, as 30 individuals completed the 2015-16 course of study earlier this spring.

Over the past two decades, CONNECT institutions have granted 106,000 degrees and 8,800 certificates – strengthening the professional backbone of the region's workforce. The organization's concentration on educational intervention and is intended to increase enrollment, retention and graduation rates of students from the region at the CONNECT campuses many will likely attend.

Toward that end, the campuses, through the Middle School College Immersion Program, hosted nearly 4,400 seventh graders from the region's Gateway Cities

throughout much of fall 2015. The endeavor was to encourage all students to think about attending college after high school. “If we started engaging students in the seventh and eighth grades, will we see improvements in retention?” asked Dr. Kaminski of the effort.

Nearly half of the visiting students still represented the first generation in their family to attend college after high school and more than half indicated they had never visited a college campus. An overwhelming 80 percent of the students said they found the visit valuable while 70 percent indicated they wanted to return for a visit the following year.

Throughout the day at the institutions, the seventh-graders met current college/university students from their hometowns who answered questions centered on the importance of attending college and the meaning of doing community service.

They experienced hands-on activities in a variety of subject areas such as engineering, psychology, biology and attended workshops in nutrition, biotech and fire science, among others. The program is likely to continue next fall.

Last summer, 48 girls aged 11-13 participated in a weeklong, in-residence STEM “Envision the Future” program at Bridgewater State University, which was planned and executed by all members of the CONNECT partnership institutions.

Activities on campus were replicated when they returned home, in partnership with their school districts and a local business, such as Sensata in Attleboro. “These girls are seen as STEM leaders back home,” said Dr. Kaminski.

CONNECT has obtained its second grant to study the potential of creating the Taunton Training & Education Center in the Myles Standish Industrial Park. The \$250,000 grant will assist in the development of a business plan and purchase capital equipment, namely a 3-D printer. The purpose of the center is to provide training and accessible equipment to regional businesses and educational organization to those who are interested in the life sciences.

“We continue to strengthen and grow the collaborations we are doing,” said Dr. Kaminski, as the partnership has also accessed a \$200,000 prior learning – or portfolio-based – assessment grant from the Davis Educational Foundation. The purpose of the grant is to help the CONNECT institutions develop a single set of policies and procedures for assessing the knowledge that adult learners age 25+ have obtained that can translate into college credit.

Work in this area would have an enormous impact on student veterans and the hundreds of thousands of adults in the region that have some college education but not a degree.

In all, faculty and staff at CONNECT institutions feed into 22 active working groups, said Dr. Kaminski, in areas such as information technology, human resources, public relations/marketing, campus safety, transfer services and, of course, the CEOs.

